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# THE EXCLUSION CLAUSE OF JEWS IN THE NORWEGIAN CONSTITUTION OF MAY 17, 1814

BY SAMUEL ABRAHAMSEN

Few names in literature have evoked more admiration, controversy, disdain or contempt than that of the Norwegian poet Henrik Arnold Wergeland (1808–1845). His almost Shakespearean poetic exuberance and passionate love for the downtrodden and the destitute were grossly misinterpreted in his own time, but they reflected the originality of a poetic genius as well as a particular philosophical outlook. Especially misinterpreted were his efforts to change a discriminatory aspect of the Norwegian Constitution, which had been adopted in 1814 after the dissolution of a four-hundred-year union with Denmark. Seldom has a literary figure entered the political arena with so few prospects of success. Rarely has a person at the end of his life seemingly failed so completely against religious and racial intolerance. At no other time has such an important cause been fought under less auspicious circumstances.<sup>1</sup> Wergeland despaired of the armor at his disposal, poetry and prose, for which mankind seemed to have no esteem. He expressed these thoughts in a poem entitled “Sandhedens Armée” (The Army of Truth):

Words, the world so light esteemeth?  
Lower yet,  
Words in poet's stanza set!  
O, how frail your power seemeth,  
To be fighting  
For the truth mankind is slighting<sup>2</sup>

The truth which Norway was “slighting” in this particular instance was that of not having lived up to her own claims to having enacted a liberal and free Constitution such as Article 100 guaranteeing freedom of speech and press.<sup>3</sup> Werge-

<sup>1</sup> Koht, Halvdan, *Henrik Wergeland—Hans liv og forfattervirksomhed-Aktmæssig fremstillet*. Særtryk af J. B. Halvorsens “Norsk Forfatterlexikon 1840–1880 (Henrik Wergeland—His Life and Work based on Documents: Special Reprint of J. B. Holvorsen's *Encyclopedia of Norwegian Authors*, 1840–1880), (Kristiania 1907), pp. 44–45.

<sup>2</sup> Wergeland's writings are cited from *Henrik Wergelands Samlede Skrifter—efter det norske Studentersamfunds Foranstaltning udgivne af Hartvig Lassen* (Chr. Tønsbergs Forlag, 1852–1857), in nine volumes, hereinafter referred to as *Skrifter*. The lines quoted here are from vol. 3, p. 305. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.—The translation of this poem is by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy in *Henrik Wergeland Poems* (Oslo 1960), p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Andenaes, Tønnes, ed., *The Constitution of Norway*, 2nd revised edition (Oslo 1962), p. 44: “There shall be liberty of the Press. No person must be punished for any writing, whatever its contents may be, which he has caused to be printed or published, unless he willfully and manifestly has either himself shown or incited others to disobedience to the laws, contempt of religion or morality or the constitutional powers, or resistance to their orders, or has advanced false and defamatory accusations against any other person. Everyone shall be free to speak his mind frankly on the administration of the State or on any other subject whatsoever.”

land pointed out that among the European countries only Spain and Norway had enacted legislation barring Jews from entering their countries. Norway had in fact become "a Protestant Spain in intolerance."<sup>4</sup> Therefore Wergeland believed that Norway's Constitution did not deserve to be called the most liberal as long as in that respect it was the most intolerant. He called this religious intolerance "the dark side of the Constitution."<sup>5</sup>

Wergeland was referring to Article 2 of "Norway's Fundamental Act of 17 May 1814," known as *Norges Grundlov*. This article, adopted on May 4, 1814 by the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvold with 94 in favor and only 7 opposed, stated:

The Evangelical-Lutheran Religion shall be maintained and constitutes the established Church of the Kingdom. The inhabitants who profess the same religion are bound to educate their children in the same. Jesuits and Monastic orders shall not be tolerated. Jews are furthermore excluded from the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

The following discussion is limited to a consideration of the last sentence of Article 2: "Jews are still excluded from admission to the Kingdom."<sup>7</sup>

This ordinance, it seems, falls within the general definition of antisemitism which authoritative sources describe as actions aimed at preventing religious and civil rights for Jews. These inimical actions take place "because it is not the Jew who is hated, but an imaginary image of them, which is confounded with reality."<sup>8</sup> Such confusion of illusion with reality have, of course, prevented normal relations between Jews and non-Jews through the centuries. Thus, by adopting

<sup>4</sup> Tveterås, Harald L., ed., *And og Ild—Henrik Wergeland—Dikt og-Prosa* (Stabenfeldt Forlag, Stavanger, n.d.), vol. ii, p. 132: "Norge var et protestantisk Spania i intolerance." (*Spirit and Fire—Henrik Wergeland Poems and Prose: "Norway was a Protestant Spain in Intolerance."*)

<sup>5</sup> Wergeland, Henrik, *Indlæg I Jødesagen til Understøttelse for Forslaget om Ophævelse af Norges Grundlovs. § 2. Sidste Passus* (Plea for the Jewish Cause in Support of the Proposal to suspend Article 2, last Paragraph of Norway's Constitution) (Kristiania 1841), pp. iv, 1 and 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Kongeriget Norges Grundlov Given I Rigsforsamlingen paa Eidsvold den 17 de mai 1814*. (The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway given at the Constitutional Assembly at Eidsvold, 17 May 1814) (Oslo 1964), p. 1. This edition contains a facsimile of the 17 May Constitution, but the translation into English, French and German is of the amended articles. Therefore, the translations do not include the prohibitions of admitting Jews and Jesuits. See also Andenæs, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> The implication of this wording seems to be that Jews had always been forbidden to reside in Norway. This is not factually true. According to Graetz, Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam were invited in 1622 by King Christian IV to "Settle in his State," which included the United Kingdoms of Norway and Denmark. See Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia 1894), vol. iv, p. 675. The official translation of the last sentence of paragraph 2, "Jews are furthermore excluded from the Kingdom," seems not to take cognizance neither of Christian IV's invitation nor of Christian V's Law of 1688 which permitted Jews from Portugal and Spain to settle in the Kingdoms. This oversight prevails right up to our time when the noted historian, Sverre Steen writes in his five-volume work *Det Frie Norge—1814* (The Free Norway—1814) (Oslo 1951), p. 164: "Jesuits and Monk Orders were excluded from the Kingdom of Norway; furthermore Jews were continued to be denied admission" ("Jesuiter og mundeordener ble stengt ute fra Norges rike; likeså ble jøder fortsatt nektet adgang").

<sup>8</sup> Valentin, Hugo, *Antisemitism Historically and Critically Examined* (London 1936), p. 305. See also Ackerman, Nathan and Jahida, Marie, *Antisemitism and Emotional Disorder* (New York 1950), p. 19: "Antisemitism is any expression of hostility, verbal or behavioral, mild or violent, against Jews as a group or against an individual Jew because of his belonging to that group."

Article 2 without any personal *acquaintance* with Jews, the members of the Norwegian Constituent Assembly had indeed in 1814 effectively barred an ethnic and religious group from entering Norway. An amendment to effect a change would need a two-thirds majority, and the battle for a change had to go through four regular parliamentary sessions before its successful adoption in the year 1851.<sup>9</sup>

The person who led this fight for religious tolerance was Henrik Arnold Wergeland. His family had come from the farm Verkland near Sogn in western Norway. His grandfather, Halvor Lassesen, had moved his family to Bergen in 1782, then had gone to sea in 1784 and was never heard of again. His widow, Antonette Augusta Nederaal, was left behind with three small children, among them Nils who later changed his first name to Nikolai and modified the ancestral name Verkland to Wergeland. He became famous all over Norway as a leading minister in the Lutheran State Church, as author, and as an elected representative to the Constituent Assembly to Eidsvold in the spring of 1814. Nikolai Wergeland studied theology at the University of Copenhagen which was the common seat for higher education for both Norway and Denmark. In 1803 he graduated with honors, settled a few years later in the city of Kristiansand in southern Norway where in 1807 he married Alette Dorothea Thaulow. They had five children, three boys and two girls, the oldest Henrik Arnoldus Wergeland, born on June 17, 1808, and named after his grandfather on his mother's side.<sup>10</sup>

Henrik grew up in Kristiansand where his family stayed until 1817. In this year his father was transferred to Eidsvold where the Constitution had been signed on May 17, 1814, a move which profoundly influenced the young, budding poet. At Eidsvold he was in close contact with living history and with the sagas of the past where the "Eidsivating" had taken place in ancient times. The beautiful nature surrounding Eidsvold is reflected in both his prose and poetry. He came to know the serious farmers, grew fond of their vernacular (*Romerikemål*) and their stories dealing with trolls and folklore. His formal education was supervised by his father who was so strongly influenced by Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation* that he wrote a book on educating young children. Throughout the years a close and loving relationship existed between father and son.<sup>11</sup>

Henrik left Eidsvold in 1819 to attend high school and to enroll at the University in Kristiania in 1825. Although it was the capital of modern Norway, its intellectual life continued to be dominated from Copenhagen despite the founding of the Royal Frederik's University in 1811. The capital had only about twenty thousand inhabitants. In such surroundings the three hundred graduate students

<sup>9</sup> Article 110 of the Constitution contains details regarding amendments. See *Kongeriget Norges Grundlov*, p. 12. The amendment for changing Article 2 was defeated by the Norwegian Parliament three times: in 1842 with 51 votes for and 43 votes against; in 1845 with 45 for and 54 against, and in 1848 when there were 43 in favor and 59 against. On 13 June 1851, the amendment was finally adopted with 93 in favor of and 10 against admission of Jews to Norway. See Koht, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>10</sup> Skavlan, Olaf, *Henrik Wergeland—Afhandlinger og Brudstykker—Efter Forfatterens Efterladte Papirer*, Udgivet ved hans hustru-Med et forord af Professor J. E. Saars (HW Treatises and occasional writings from the author's posthumous papers, published by his wife with a preface by Professor J. E. Saars) (Kristiania 1892), pp. 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> Beyer, Harald, "Forholdet mellem H. Wergeland og hans far" (The Relationship between HW and his Father), *Edda*, vol. xxiv (1926), pp. 81 ff.

took on a disproportionate importance in the cultural and political life of the city. Henrik enrolled as student of theology (1825–1829) and took an active part in student organizations.<sup>12</sup> He published frequently, mainly patriotic songs such as “Ode til Norges Frihed” (An Ode to Norway’s Liberty), or erotic poems, e.g., “Ida and Selma” in which he referred to his two loves, Ida Haffner and Emilie Selmer. Few people seemed to have paid much attention to Wergeland’s early literary output until the publication in 1830 of *Skabelsen, Mennesket og Messias* (The Creation, Man and Messiah). A fair estimate of Wergeland’s position and contributions to Norway’s culture is made by Brynjulf Hovde who stated: “Because he was both intensely Norwegian and intensely human, he stands not only as the founder of modern Norwegian literature, but as the prophet to whom all shades of opinion endeavor to trace their origin.”<sup>13</sup>

Wergeland had deep roots in the Age of Enlightenment as well as that of Romanticism.<sup>14</sup> He was spiritually related to the German poets of the “Sturm und Drang” period, Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), Ludwig Börne (1786–1837), to the Norwegian author Henrich Steffens (1773–1845), the philosopher Niels Treschow (1751–1833), the Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), the British poets Byron and Shelley,<sup>15</sup> and to the French authors Victor Hugo and Madame de Staël. All these fought for liberty and clamored for rebellion against tyranny.

Wergeland was the Norwegian poet *par excellence* of liberty. He was not concerned with the freedom of Norway only but also with that of Europe and all humanity. The revolutionary movements that swept from France across Europe gave impetus to this spread of liberal ideas also in Norway. In Wergeland’s work we can observe his strong affinity to European literary movements and his desire for political and religious liberty and national unity. In him Norway found a unique exponent for the great freedom movements of the 1830’s, a poet who represented the struggle for numerous national demands including those of “Norwegian speech at the theatres, Norwegian as the written language, Norwegian flags over the fortresses, Norwegian title for the King, and Norwegian participation in the conduct of foreign affairs.”<sup>16</sup>

Wergeland’s concepts of the function of a poet in a democratic society echo the slogans of the French revolution, liberty, equality, and fraternity, the poet being the central figure in such a society and the true prophet of future progress. The term “prophet” is used advisedly because Wergeland was thoroughly convinced that he had a religious mission, and that the role of the poet, as expressed

<sup>12</sup> Koht, “Studentertliv i Wergelandstiden” (Student Life during the Era of Wergeland), *Samtiden*, 1908, pp. 376–385.

<sup>13</sup> Hovde, B. J., *The Scandinavian Countries, 1720–1865, The Rise of the Middle Class* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1948), vol. ii, p. 450.

<sup>14</sup> Erich, Valborg, *Henrik Wergeland i hans forhold til Henrich Steffens* (HW in his relationship to Henrich Steffens) (Kristiania 1920), p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> Schulerud, Mentz, “Norwegian Literature from Dawn to Golden Age,” in *Scandinavia Past and Present* (Arnkron, Odense, Denmark, 1959), p. 892.

<sup>16</sup> Koht, *Verda og Noreg—Historie frå skilde tider* (The World and Norway—History from different periods) (Oslo 1962) pp. 169–170.

in his article about Carl Fredrik Ridderstad in 1834, was to lead the nation,<sup>17</sup> to be ahead of his own time, and to be a teacher of the common man. Wergeland was ready to battle for his political and social ideas as well as for his esthetic concepts or literary causes. Since poets are proponents of ideas, teachers of nations, and the ones who express the conscience of the nation, Wergeland became a pioneer in democracy, a fighter for social and religious reforms, a man who lived by his convictions.<sup>18</sup>

Next to his own country he loved France, the "cradle of liberty" (*Frihedens Vugge*). On his visit to Paris in 1831 he had met two Moroccan Jews. In his memoirs, *Hassel-Nødder, med og uden Kjerne*, (Hazelnuts, with and without Kernels) No. 24, he describes this scene: "I felt humbled in front of them as if I stood confronted with two ancestors of humanity or in front of Abraham and Melchizedek under whose tent the only true God was worshipped."<sup>19</sup> In his essay, "De egentlige Opavsmænd til Jødernes Emancipation" (The Real Originators of the Emancipation of the Jews), he reported that he had forgotten this episode. Eight years later, in 1839, he recalled the conversation as it had taken place at the "Quai de l'Institut." The Moroccan Jews had stated that their situation was more tolerable in Morocco than in many Christian countries. Wergeland continued:

The thought of the situation of the Jews among us was next. I found it disgraceful.—The Norwegian people could not have thanked God in a more beautiful way for freedom than to show his chosen people love and concern—a people that would reward them so richly.<sup>20</sup>

But instead of love and concern for the people who had brought forth the Savior, only scorn and contempt had been shown the Jews by their being barred from Norway. From then on until his death in 1845, Wergeland devoted himself to the task of obtaining support for a constitutional amendment to rescind this restriction. He regarded it as a question of the highest significance, a problem of such dimensions that it went beyond common considerations and entered into the field of cosmopolitan humanitarianism. In a way it became his last cause—a cause for which he fought valiantly. He used all the means at his disposal, as a practical politician, as a theologian, as an agitator, but most of all he put his poetic genius to work for this main purpose: to win admission for the Jewish people to the Kingdom of Norway. He realized, however, the vast amount of prejudice he had to overcome, especially among the farmers.<sup>21</sup>

His ecstasy and exuberance for this just cause of freedom was part of his religiosity. He exclaims in his poem "Political Articles of Belief" ("Politiske Troesartikler") (1845):

<sup>17</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 7 (1853), p. 454: "Om den unge svenske Skjald Ridderstad." De sanne diktere "stode i Spidsen for sin Tid. De levede i Sphærer, deres Tid endnu ikke igjennemaskar; og deres kvad vare Forjettelser." ("About the young Swedish poet Ridderstad." The true poets were ahead of their times. They lived in spheres which their own times had not yet reached and their poems were foreboding.)

<sup>18</sup> Benterud, Aagot, *Henrik Wergeland's Religiøse Utvikling* (HW's Religious Development) (Dreyers Forlag, n.d.), pp. 148ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 8, p. 571.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 572.

<sup>21</sup> Møller, Herluf, *Henrik Wergeland* (Copenhagen 1905), p. 222.



I think our Constitution is the  
     best on earth,  
 but not that every word has the  
     same worth.  
 Thus, to give an example, everyone  
     should choose one's own temple.  
 You must be free to choose your faith too,  
 What ought to be changed,  
     is Article 2.<sup>22</sup>

Wergeland looked upon the admission of Jews as a question of religious tolerance and regarded the attitude of the *Storting* to the Jewish question as a "test of the people's humanism."<sup>23</sup> On June 28, 1839 Wergeland sent a proposal to eliminate the last paragraph of Article 2 *via* a member of the *Storting*, Søren Anton Wilhelm Sørensen (1793–1853). Halvdan Koht, in his book on Wergeland,<sup>24</sup> surmised that what impelled him to take this step was the fact that on May 12, 1839, a Jew from Altona had arrived in Kristiania by boat. Since this person did not know that Jews were barred from Norway, he immediately turned back after having been warned not to disembark without at first obtaining a letter of safe conduct. There is also the incident of 1817 involving a shipwrecked crew with a Polish Jew, Michael Jonas, who arrived in Bergen on his way from Königsberg to London. Mr. Jonas was arrested and transported as a common criminal under police surveillance to Kristiania and from there to Sweden.<sup>25</sup> It is this episode which Wergeland used in his poem, "Skibbruddet" ("The Shipwreck"), where the waves are mercifully victorious since democratic Norway would not offer asylum to Jews.<sup>26</sup>

Other occurrences of similar discriminatory nature had become publicly

<sup>22</sup> Wergeland, *Normandens Katechisme. Anden forøgede og omarbejdede Udgave* (HW, The Norwegian Catechism, 2nd enlarged and rev. ed.) (Kristiania 1845), p. 14.

"Jeg troer vor Grundlov bedst paa Jord  
 dog ej, at bedst er hvert et Ord.  
 Saaledes troer jeg for Exempel,  
 at Hver bør vælge frit sit Tempel.  
 Man friest være maa i Tro;  
 thi bør forandres § 2."

<sup>23</sup> Beyer, *Norsk og fremmed—Artikler i udvalg. Minneskrift til syttiårsdagen for hans fødsel*, 15. november 1961 (Norwegian and Foreign-Selected Articles commemorating the seventieth Anniversary for his Birth, November 15, 1961) (Oslo 1961), p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> Koht, *Henrik Wergeland, Ei Folkeskrift* (HW A popular work) (Kristiania 1908), p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Jæger, Henrik, *Illustrert Norsk Litteraturhistorie*, (Illustrated History of Norwegian Literature, Kristiania, 1896), vol. ii, p. 235: "den skibbrudne Jøde var saaledes imod sin Vilje nødt til at betræde norsk Grunn. Følgen var at an øieblikkelig blev fakkert av Øvrigheden, og som en Forbryder under Politi-eskorte transporteret til Kristiania, og derfra over den svenske Grænse." ("The shipwrecked Jew was thus against his will forced to step on Norwegian soil. As a consequence he was immediately captured by the authorities and just as a criminal transported to Kristiania under police escort and from there over to the Swedish border.")

<sup>26</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 3 (1853), p. 316:

"Sugende den grep ham,  
     førte i oprørte  
 Bølgers Grav ham ud paany —  
 ak! som om den vidste, Norge,  
 det berømte, frie, borge  
 vilde ej en Jøde Ly?"

known through the press, and had contributed considerably to establishing a more favorable climate for discussing the pros and cons of a complicated problem.<sup>27</sup> It was, of course, Wergeland who contributed the most compelling arguments. Can a Christian state exclude other human beings whose family life is beyond reproach and whose philanthropy is worthy of imitating? Shall a people whose history abounds in spiritual giants, mighty law-givers, and leaders in ethics, science, art, literature, and philosophy, be forever barred from Norway? These questions pressed themselves on Wergeland while he was preparing a document, *Indlæg i Jødesagen til Understøttelse for Forslaget om Ophævelse af Norges Grundlovs Paragraph 2, sidste Passus* (Plea for the Jewish Cause to Support the Proposal to Amend the Last Sentence of Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution, 1841) which pleaded the cause of considering the admission of Jews during the next regular session of the *Storting*, to be opened on August 26, 1842.

Meanwhile Wergeland had established contacts with Jewish communities in other European countries and obtained pertinent information as to their position.<sup>28</sup> Especially interesting and valuable were his contacts with the Jewish communities in Sweden. While working on his pamphlet *Indlæg i Jødesagen*, he wrote on July 9, 1841 to the head of the Jewish congregation in Stockholm, Mr. Lamm, asking for information regarding Jewish contributions to Christian charities in Sweden, their occupations, police records, etc.<sup>29</sup> Numerous letters were also exchanged with Dr. Jacob Levertin, Stockholm, and Mr. Michael S. Warburg, Danish Consul in Gothenburg. Through this correspondence we obtain a very clear picture of Wergeland's thinking throughout the decisive year, 1841–1842. His information had to be accurate to refute all the false accusations against Jews. From the police commissioner in Stockholm, Mr. Wannquist, he learned that during the preceding twenty-eight years no Jew had ever been accused of murder or theft. From Denmark he learned that in the very same year that Norway barred the entry of Jews, the Danish parliament conferred, on March 27, full civil rights on its Jewish citizens. He showed further that the Catholic countries of France and Belgium had granted Jews a fatherland “in the real meaning of the word” and that the Jews had contributed to the welfare of the nation far out of proportion to their numbers.

In a letter of February 15, 1842 Wergeland mentioned to Dr. Levertin the

<sup>27</sup> *Storthingsforhandlinger* 1842, pp. 270–274 contain detailed information regarding police enforcement of the constitutional prohibition of admitting Jews to Norway. One such instance involved an application of July 17, 1834, from the Department of Finance to the Department of Justice regarding a letter of safe conduct to Solomon Heine (uncle of the famous Heinrich Heine) to complete a loan to the State of Norway on behalf of the banking firm Hambro & Søn. *Ibid.*, pp. 273–274.—Another incident of similar nature involved Jewish participants in the Scandinavian Conference of natural scientist at Kristiania in 1844. Dr. L. Levertin of Stockholm wrote to Wergeland on March 21, 1843 stating that no Jewish scientist was likely to attend under the humiliating condition of having to apply for a letter of safe conduct (Lejdebrev). On October 12, 1843 a Royal Letter of Safe Conduct was issued to all Jewish participants without mentioning name, thus adding insult to injury. See Koht, *op. cit.*, 1907, p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Bull, Francis, and Paasche, Fredrik, *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* (Oslo 1959), vol. iii, p. 280.

<sup>29</sup> Seip, Arub, Didrik, “Henrik Wergeland og jødene il Sverige,” (HW and he Jews in Sweden), *Edda*, 1927, p. 114. Cf. Wergeland, *Indlæg i Jødesagen*, pp. 68–70, 82.



comments his opponents offered. "Why do you want to harm your fatherland?" they asked. Wergeland's characteristic reply followed: "I, who love my country in an almost sinful manner, which means to love it almost more than humanity and justice."<sup>30</sup> Wergeland lost many friends during this period, but he also gained new ones. His isolation and many disappointments because of his efforts for the Jewish cause, especially the lack of support from the farmers, did not make him despondent, but rather strengthened his faith in a just cause. In April 1842 he published "Jøden. Ni blomstrende Torneqviste" (The Jew. Nine Blossoming Briar Shoots)<sup>31</sup> which belong to the best poetry and prose in Norwegian literature. In his poem "The Army of Truth," which introduced the cycle "The Jew," Wergeland expressed faith in the ultimate victory of truth through poetry:

Onward yet, brave words, undaunted,  
     How so few!  
 Earthly triumph has to you  
 By the God of light been granted  
     Who are serving  
 Truth, his child, with faith unswerving.  
  
 Cease then, puny host, your quailing,  
     Truth her cause  
 Through defeat to triumph draws:  
 Falsehood's desert heights assailing,  
     See, your powers  
 Dissipate those phantom towers!<sup>32</sup>

It is, however, in his poem "Juleaftenen" that Wergeland reached the apex of *idédikning* (propagandistic prose and poetry) without violating the truth.<sup>33</sup> Could Christians really be that harsh? In a poem "Røst i Orknen" (Voice in the Desert) Wergeland stated:

Hearts of Christians all should glow  
 With the warmth of Christmas fare,  
     Honey-sweet,  
 Heaped for all the world to eat,  
 Should it chance to enter there;  
 Decked with sprigs of roses gay,

<sup>30</sup> Seip, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 3 (1853), pp. 301–338. This collection of poems contains: "The Army of Truth" (*Sandhedens Armée*); "The Three (*De Tre*); "The Shipwreck" (*Skibbruddet*); "Christmas Eve" (*Juleaftenen*); "The French Guardsmen Mourning Their Sergeant, the Jew Michael" (*den franske Garde over sin Sergeant, Jøden Michael*); "The Jewess" (*Jødinden*); "The Child" (*Barnet*); "Moses on the Mountain" (*Moses paa Bjerget*); "The Thistledown-Gatherer" (*Tidselskjægplukkeren*); "Love for Nature and Mankind" (*Natur-og Menneskekjærlighed*). They were dedicated to the Norwegian Parliament which had to decide the future relationship between Norway and the Jewish people. The dedication reads as follows: "Norges Storting helliges disse Medfølelsens udgydelser for den berømte, fortjente, ulykkelige Green af Menneskeslægten, hvis fremtidige Forhold til Fædrelandet det skal afgjøre. *Quod felix patriae faustumque sit!* (These sympathetic outpourings favoring the famous, deserving, unhappy branch of humanity are dedicated to Norway's Parliament which must decide its future relationship to the Fatherland. *May it bring good luck and happiness to the Nation!* (*ibid.*, p. 303).

<sup>32</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. iii, p. 306 (tr. by Gathorne-Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102).

<sup>33</sup> Bull and Paasche, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

As for festal holiday.  
Woe! Woe!  
Ice they are, or lumps of snow,  
Stones, within whose crannies dwell  
Swarms obscene from blackest hell;  
All their softness merely mold,  
Though like velvet to behold.<sup>34</sup>

Wergeland's agitation for the Jewish cause was synthetized in his dramatic poem "Juleaften" which deals with the peddler, Gamle-Jakob, symbol of the Eternal People. The "aged Jew" is on his way from Sweden to Norway in a furious snow-storm in Tived-Forest:

Who has not seen  
A storm so fierce the Heav'ns could send no worse?  
So wild, it seemed that every tortured soul,  
From Cain's and down  
To the latest damned, had fled from Hell,  
Accursed on earth and still defying Heaven?  
  
A storm whose fright  
Once heard, could never be forgot?  
For every human felt: This is for me,  
My sins alone:  
The thunders roar at me, and only me;  
My secret sins are bared to those on high.  
  
A storm whose force  
Bends priest and flock alike down to their knees  
To worship demons, in that element  
Whose awful din,  
Once heard in youth, still rings in moss-grown ears . . . .  
Unearthly earthquake, Doomsday of the sky?  
  
A storm to jar  
The bravest heart within its sheltering breast.  
A heaven-tempest, whirling one's own name,  
Called out by ghosts,  
Echoed ever louder by the winds,  
And every tree-top screaming like a raven?  
  
But ravens fled  
To rocky shelter; hunger tamed the wolf.  
The wily fox stayed safe within his lair.  
In every home  
The lights were out, the watchdog safe inside.  
What prayers besiege Thee, Lord, on such a night!  
  
\* \* \* \* \*  
  
In such a storm—on Christmas Eve, it was—  
When night had come before the day was done,  
An aged Jew, exhausted, struggled on  
Through Sweden's dismal wasteland, Tived Forest.  
Village children waited anxiously

<sup>34</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. iii, p. 400 (tr. by Gathorne-Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 139–140).

To see him come, from towns beyond the woods,  
 For in his pack were ribbons braid, and such  
 As children love to give on Christmas Day,  
 On New Year's Day, and all throughout the season,  
 They waited, tense, but yet with no alarm,  
 For never yet had Jacob failed to come  
 At Christmas time; he came as certainly  
 As Christmas Eve itself.

In such a storm . . . "Hark! Could it be the wind  
 That howled among the branches? How it shrieked!  
 And how it shrieked again!" Old Jacob stops  
 At once, and listens for the sound again.  
 But silence now. A wave of storm engulfs him,  
 As waves at sea engulf a drowning man.  
 He travels onward. "Hark! Another sound!"

It sheared its way through all the forest noise.  
 "The owl's deceptive cry is like a child's.  
 Yet who would let a child go out in this?  
 The wolves themselves have better sense than that."  
 So onward through the snow he fights his way.  
 Again a cry, which this time leaves no doubt;  
 For on the stormy gale and gusty wind  
 Which sweeps a snowy whirlpool through the trees  
 Is borne a word, a single human word!  
 At once he stops and, turning toward the source,  
 Goes deep into the forest, ever deeper,  
 Deep in snow and deep in darkest night.

With every step, black mountain-walls appear,  
 Coal black, though formed of whitest snow,  
 As though the great wide forest-depths were filled  
 With ghostly, veil-clad monsters fleeing about,  
 Howling, stopping short before his eyes,  
 Whirling fright'ningly on sprightly toes  
 And off again among the spectral trees.

The old man fights his way against the storm.  
 He gropes on through the fury; in the lulls,  
 When breath comes hard, he sinks upon his knees,  
 But up again at once, and through the gloom—  
 A dwarf through earthy darkness feels his way.  
 He hears no more, but shivers at the thought  
 Of being mocked upon by evil hosts,  
 While mumbled prayers burst forth upon his lips.  
 Again he hears a whimper, this time near;  
 His eager shout is wrested by the wind  
 And hurled again into his face. But hist!  
 Just ten more steps! A dark form in the snow  
 Has barely stirred, as though the gusty wind  
 Were idly toying with a loosened stump.

"O Jehovah! An arm! Oh Jehovah!  
 A child, a child! But surely dead!"  
 Ah, the shining stars that night so long ago

When Bethlehem's starlight mingled with the rest—  
Did they not know good deeds are done on earth?  
They had not seen old Jacob's noble deed.  
With all the joy of finding sudden gold,  
He flung aside his pack, his earthly wealth,  
Drew off his cloak and wrapped its woolly folds  
About the frozen limbs, then bared his breast  
And placed the little cheek against the warmth  
Of his own heartbeats, wakening life anew.  
Then up again. But whither now? The storm  
Had snowed away his footsteps. But, no fear—  
For, 'mid the rumbling thunder in the trees  
He heard the joyous chords of David's harps;  
The swirling drifts of snow were cherubim  
On snow-white wings, to lead him on his way;  
Where'er he went, whichever path he took,  
He felt the guiding finger of the Lord.

In Tived's depths, could any house be found  
On such a night, when all the lights were out?  
Yes, midway through, there stood one single hut  
Whose low, white roof so blended with the snow  
That its dark wall stood forth like jagged rock.  
To this, by some great miracle, he came  
And sank to earth; he had no further strength.  
Through many a windy gust he fought his way  
And stumbled with his burden to the door.  
His knock at first was soft—the child still slept;  
And now he missed the pack he'd cast aside,  
For here he was, without a single thing  
To show the humble folk he knew would come  
With friendly smiles to greet him at the door.  
Alas, he knocked and knocked, with no response,  
Until, "In Heaven's name, who's out in this?"  
"Tis I, Old Jacob, Do you not remember?  
I am the Jew. . . ." "What?—Jew" A frightened scream  
Of man's and woman's mingled voices, harsh  
"Then stay outside. We can't afford to buy.  
You only bring misfortune to our home,  
You Jew, who slew our Savior, born this night."  
"I?"

"Yes, your Jewish kind. And for that sin  
A thousand generations must atone."  
"Alas! Tonight, when even dogs are in."  
"Dogs, yes, but never Jew, in Christian home."

He heard no more. The harshness of those words  
Pierced colder through him than the coldest wind,  
With far more bitter strength they forced him down  
Into the snow; still with the sleeping child.  
Then, searching for the whiteness of a face  
Behind a darkened window—all in vain—  
He felt as though he sank in quilts of down—  
As though a strange new warmth came over him,  
And that familiar forms, soft-whispering,

Like gentle winds across the summer fields,  
 Circled 'round his downy bed, till One,  
 With beckoning finger, whispered, "Come! He sleeps."  
 Then all at once, into a dazzling hall  
 Near by, they vanished, all except the child,  
 Who stood there, watching by his bedside,  
 Gathering snowy pillows close about him  
 Till, overpowered, he settled back to sleep.  
 —The snow grew ever softly o'er the dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Good Lord! That Jew is sitting out there yet!"  
 The husband cried next day, when he looked out.  
 "Then frighten him away! It's Christmas Day!"  
 The wife replied. "See how the rascal Jew  
 Snuggles that bundle close against his breast!"  
 "How insistent he is, trying to sell his stuff,  
 Giving us that icy stare, as though  
 We had the money for such things as that.  
 "And yet—I'd rather like to see his wares."  
 "Open your bag, then, Jew," and both stepped out.  
 At such a sight—a corpse's frozen stare—  
 They turned more pale than he and shrieked with fright,  
 And trembled with remorse.

"O Jemini!

What terrible thing is this?" They raised him up.  
 The bundle came along. Undoing his cloak,  
 They found with arms entwined about his neck,  
 Their Margaretha—like the Jew a corpse.  
 No lightning stroke, nor acid sting of snake,  
 Could match the painful blow that struck this pair.  
 The snow itself was not as white as he,  
 Nor could her cries be smothered by the storm,  
 "Oh, God has punished us! Not winter storm,  
 But our own wickedness has killed this child!  
 Just as this Jew knocked vainly at our door,  
 We two shall knock at mercy's door in vain."

\* \* \* \* \*

When forest paths were cleared, there came the tale  
 Of Gretha, from the family where she stayed,  
 And how, when Christmas Eve was drawing near,  
 Before the storm began, she wandered off  
 Toward her home, to spend the holiday.  
 And no one thought of asking for the child,  
 But only for the Jew they all awaited.  
 And now it was too late for gifts, in church.  
 They hoped he'd come in time for New Year's Day.

Instead, he lay there dead before the hearth,  
 Where also sat the man, more rigid-bent,  
 More frozen too of eye than was the corpse,  
 Staring deep into the glowing coals  
 Which now he coaxed to flame, so that the corpse  
 Could be laid out with folded hands on chest.

Beside him, Margaretha's mother kneeled  
And placed the little arms 'round Jacob's neck.

"She is no longer ours," she sobbed aloud.  
"He gave his life for her, and she is his.  
We dare not now take Gretha back again,  
For she must speak to Jesus up in Heaven,  
And plead for intercession; for to Him  
Poor Jews will bring their accusations . . ."<sup>35</sup>

This poem is among the finest which Wergeland wrote in order to make his countrymen accept an idea of fundamental importance not only for Norway, but for all mankind. "The honor of the country is at stake"<sup>36</sup> when, for instance, the dog is let in, but not any of the Jewish faith who is accused of deicide. This old accusation was still rampant in Christian countries.<sup>37</sup> It was after almost two thousand years of injustice, in November, 1964, that the Catholic Church stated that "the Jewish people should never be presented as one rejected, cursed or guilty of deicide,"<sup>38</sup> an accusation repeated over and over again for centuries, and these accusations had been proved "to be evil and unfounded."<sup>39</sup>

In preparing Norwegian public opinion for the parliamentary debate regarding admission of Jews, Wergeland had to refute the many false and baseless charges against their religion, their moral conduct, and their responsibilities as citizens. The parliamentary debate on that issue, which started on September 9, 1842, lasted for seven hours. Wergeland, an attentive listener, has given us a very vivid and detailed account of what took place.<sup>40</sup> He started out by noting that there are times in the affairs of any nation when there may be a shortage of men willing to make difficult decisions.<sup>41</sup> The poet continued to note that Friday the 9th of September 1842 had been an important day in Norway's history since on that day the proposal to rescind the constitutional prohibition had been decided upon.<sup>42</sup>

Wergeland had prepared the way carefully, not only through prose and poetry but also by printing handbills. Every representative in Parliament had a copy of his "Plea for the Jewish Cause" (*Indlæg i Jødesagen*) together with a copy of the Bible pointing to appropriate passages, such as loving one's neighbor. One of the handbills had been printed in such large type that they could be read from the

<sup>35</sup> *Skifter*, vol. iii, pp. 316-322 (tr. by Palmer J. Hertsgaard of The Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn, New York).

<sup>36</sup> Jæger, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 238.

<sup>37</sup> Isaac, Jules, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York 1965), p. 109: "No idea has been more destructive and has had more deadly effect on the scattered Jewish minorities living in Christian countries than the pernicious view of them as the deicide people."

<sup>38</sup> *The New York Times*, November 19, 1964, "Vatican Council Gets Strong Text Absolving Jews," pp. 1, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 117; cf. Flannery, Edward H., *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Anti-Semitism* (New York 1965), pp. 27ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Skifter*, vol. 8, "Jødesagen i det norske Storting" (The Jewish Cause in the Norwegian Parliament), pp. 435-39.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>42</sup> *Loc. cit.*



gallery. They were "meant for the farmers to enable them to read without glasses." This important handbill contained the following:

To Parliament.

What is morally right ought to happen. It is also morally necessary and useful in our time although its utility may not be clear at the moment. This is as certain is that that which is morally wrong carries its own inner punishment although it may be temporarily useful. This is the *Constitution* for the Government of God, for the moral order in the world, and is recommended for serious reflection concerning today's question of Article 2, last paragraph of *our* Constitution. In addition, there are many positive, unambiguous and religious commands for the Christians from the mouth of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, such as Matth. 5, 44-45; 7, 12, 22, 39; Luk. 6, 36; Herbr. 19, etc., all of which confirm the above.

Kristiania, September 9th, 1842,

Respectfully,  
Henrik Wergeland.<sup>43</sup>

For Wergeland, therefore, admission of Jews was a moral issue of the highest order, one which for him had become a question of conscience. His father, Nicolai Wergeland (1780-1848), an exponent of eighteenth-century humanism and rationalism,<sup>44</sup> was his main source of influence and his best friend.<sup>45</sup> Nicolai Wergeland had been a member of the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvold in 1814 where he was one of the strongest opponents of the admission of Jews to Norway.<sup>46</sup> But his son took the opposite stand.

It is only reasonable to assume that Wergeland was familiar with most of the common anti-Jewish arguments used during the debate on Article 2 in 1814. District Judge Christian Magnus Falsen, "father" of the Constitution and acknowledged majority leader,<sup>47</sup> was characterized by Wergeland as

the most outstanding personality of the Constituent Assembly, especially useful because of his knowledge of constitutional law, and because of his draft for a constitution, sharp-witted, energetic, passionate, of untiring working capacity, exalted patriot, imposing by countenance and appearance. The most popular, or more correctly, the most powerful within any part of the whole Assembly.<sup>48</sup>

In October 1817 Falsen replied in *Den Norske Tilskuere* to a letter sent to him by Mr. Glogou, a converted Jew in the city of Bergen. In his reply Falsen stated that he had been a member of both the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvold in 1814 and also of the committee to submit proposals for constitutional drafts. Falsen had voted against admission of Jews because he was convinced that they could never become good citizens of any state where the Jews did not rule. Then Falsen repeated the erroneous accusations:

A religion that breathes nothing but hatred and contempt against everyone who does not confess it, forces the Jew, so to speak, to constant opposition against

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 454-455.

<sup>44</sup> Wasberg, Gunnar Christie, *Historien om 1814. En beretning i dokumenter, sitater og illustrasjoner*. (The story about 1814. A Description with Documents, Quotations and Illustrations) (Oslo 1964), p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Bull and Paasche, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Beyer, *Henrik Wergeland* (Oslo 1946), p. 364.

<sup>47</sup> Larsen, Karen, *A History of New York* (New York 1948), p. 383.

<sup>48</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 9, p. 137.

everything that does not do homage to Judaism. He lives in a perpetual state of war with every nation which accepts him, and his religion makes it his duty to work for this nation's destruction.—I want only to point out to you the principal idea which, so far as I know, motivated the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvold to introduce the controversial clause in the Constitution, and one should regard Norway's position at the separation from Denmark as so much more fortunate since it could, without doing injustice to anyone, include in its Constitution an article which perhaps would have been most beneficial to other countries as well.

Falsen went on to explain to Glogou that it was not only as merchants but especially as adherents of the Mosaic religion that the Norwegian Constitution had excluded Jews from Norway. If any Jew were to ask Falsen for the rationale of such discrimination, the answer would be:

You may be a just man, you have not offended me, but your faith is of such a nature that it cannot harmonize with our form of government. It is as a Jew, not as a human being, that we have excluded you. I could name for you states where the Jews by the hundreds of thousands have been mistreated, murdered, expelled, and deprived of their properties. It is in these states that you have to complain about injustices; they do not apply to us. We have not deprived you of anything, we have not imposed on you any restriction, we have only provided for our own security.<sup>49</sup>

In his *Norges Konstitutions Historie*<sup>50</sup> (The History of Norway's Constitution) Henrik Wergeland included a report on the session that took place on April 16, 1814 at Eidsvold. The following additional antisemitic argument was expressed during the debate on the eight "basic proposals" (*Grundsætninger*) by Nicolai Wergeland and Dr. Georg Sverdrup, Professor of Greek Philology and Ancient Philosophy at the Royal Frederik's University in Kristiania: Since it was alleged that the Jews regarded fraud against Christians not only as permissible but as meritorious, they had themselves forfeited all rights to be admitted.<sup>51</sup>

The debate also heard the views of Pastor Hans Jakob Grøgaard who maintained that it would be considered neither intolerant nor unliberal to refuse admission to Jews since "the question was not to expel the Jews from the country." The "foremost among the farmers,"<sup>52</sup> Teis Jakob Torkildsen Lundegaard (from Austad) made an abrupt end to the discussion "by quickly standing up with the cry:

<sup>49</sup> *Den Norske Tilskuer* (The Norwegian Observer), Bergen, nos. 41 and 42, October 6, 1817, pp. 334–336.

<sup>50</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 9, pp. 159–160: *Grundsætninger til en Konstitution*, no. 8: "Den evangelisk — Lutherske Religion bør forblive Statens og Regentens Religion. Alle Religions-Sekter tilstedes fri Religions øvelse; dog ere jøder fremdeles udelukkede fra Adgang til Riget." The statement that "all religious sects are guaranteed free religious exercise" was omitted from Article 2 in the Constitution of 1814. It was only 150 years later, on May 9, 1964, that the Norwegian Parliament unanimously passed an amendment to Article 2 guaranteeing free religious exercise to all inhabitants: "Alle Indvaanere af Riget have fri Religionsudøvelse."

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164 (Kristiana 1857): "Jøderne skulde anse Bedrageri mod Kristne for tilladt, ja fortjensfuldt, og maatte saaledes ansees for selv at have betaget sig al Ret til Optagelse" (Jews are supposed to consider fraud against Christians as permissible, yes, meritorious, and have thus to be regarded as having excluded themselves from all rights to admission).

<sup>52</sup> Wasberg, *op. cit.*, p. 50: "Den fremste bonden var likevel Teis Lundegaard fra Austad."

'Arise everyone who will not have Jews in the country.' And everyone stood up, as by an electric shot."<sup>53</sup> As previously mentioned, the prohibition of the entry of Jews was voted on Wednesday, May 4, 1814 with 94 in favor and 7 against.

Between the years 1814 and 1842, however, the economic, social and political conditions had changed so much that a reversal of the discriminatory paragraph seemed possible. Wergeland had completed his own studies which made it abundantly clear that the anti-Jewish arguments were based on falsehood and ignorance. A survey by Leiv Amundsen of Wergeland's reading at the University Library in Kristiania showed the poet's wide interest in the Jewish problem.<sup>54</sup> He had assisted the Constitutional Committee during the preceding years in preparing forty-seven important documents in Danish, Dutch, English, French, German and Swedish, not all of them favorable to the Jewish cause. Those in German warned against admitting Jews.<sup>55</sup> Wergeland had prepared primary source material to show how Jews were treated in France and Holland, in Catholic Belgium, and in North America "which had offered the Jews a fatherland in the complete meaning of the word, and these have offered the country their best efforts, their property and their blood.—In all the above countries no one regards the native Jew (*den i Landet Fødte Jøde*) as stranger."<sup>56</sup>

Ever since 1831 Wergeland had been writing about foreign affairs in the Norwegian press, at first in *Statsborgeren en Tidende for Norges Vel* (The Citizen, a Publication for the Welfare of Norway), founded by Peder Soelvold. In 1835, when the latter was forced to give it up, Wergeland became a member of its editorial board with the main function of writing *den politiske Artikel* (the political article),<sup>57</sup> which included surveys of Europe's political problems, U.S. Congressional debates, as well as terror in Poland, Belgian revolt against Holland, German rapprochement to Russia, British isolationist policy, civil war in Spain, and France under Louis Philippe who, Wergeland said, had betrayed "that part of Europe which would have utilized the July Revolution for its liberation."<sup>58</sup>

It was also in *Statsborgeren* of March 26, 1837 and April 2 where Wergeland stated that citizens living under "the most conclusive despotism have greater

<sup>53</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 9, pp. 164-165, "Grøgaard fandt, at da Spørgsmaalet ikke var om at udjage jøderne af Landet, kunde det ikke kaldes intolerant eller illiberalt at nekte dem Adgangen;—Spindværingen Teis Lundegaard gjorde omsider en brad Ende paa Debatten ved raskt at rejse sig med Raabet: 'Staar op Alle, som ingen Jøder vilde have i Landet!' Og alle fulgte det som ved et elektrisk Stød."

<sup>54</sup> Amundsen, Leiv, "Henrik Wergeland og Universitetsbiblioteket," *Edda*, vol. xlv (1945), pp. 120-121, 131; among the books Wergeland borrowed in 1839 were: February 18. Chr. Fr. Rühls, *Over Jødernes Fordringer paa Tydske Borgerret* (Kbh., 1816), and by the same author, *Christendommens og det Tydsk Folks Rettigheder Forsvarede mod Jødernes Fordringer* (Kbh., 1817). Also on August 7, 1839: N. Treschow, "Kultur forbinder Nationer, men smelter dem ikke sammen, En Tale holden 1811 i den jødiske Frieskole," (Kbh., 1811). Also April 24, 1844, J. W. Gertz, *Det befriede Israel*, (Kbh., 1804).

<sup>55</sup> Storthingsforhandlinger, 1842, vol. ix, "Storthinget den 9 de September," p. 259: "5 Exemplarer af et trykt Skrift under Titel: Beweis aus der jüdischen Religion, dass die Juden in den christlichen Staaten nicht emanzipiert werden können, wenn die Christen nicht dadurch sich ihnen zinsbar und unterthan machen wollen."

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 254-55.

<sup>57</sup> Bull and Paasche, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>58</sup> As quoted in Egeland, Kjølsv, "Henrik Wergeland og utlandet," *Edda*, vol. xlv (1945), p. 168: "den Del af Europa som vilde benyttet sig af Juli-revolutionen til sin Befrielse."

freedom of religion than the Norwegians.”<sup>59</sup> But this publication issued its last copy in December 1837, and from then on it became increasingly difficult for Wergeland to gain access to the main papers in the nation’s capital, perhaps because for two years he had accepted a royal honorarium at two hundred dollars annually.<sup>60</sup> This made him look like a traitor in the eyes of some leading newspapers, such as *Den Constitutionelle* that called him “a drunkard of aquavitt and a glutton of wheycheese.”<sup>61</sup> Following his bitter fight with Ludvig Kristensen Daae, the editor of *Granskeren*, and A. B. Stabell, editor of the influential *Morgenbladet*, their two publications were closed to him. One incident after another, his exclusion from being the keynote speaker at the annual celebration of the founding of the Royal Frederik’s University on September 2, 1841, his exclusion from membership in the noted reading circle “Athenaeum,”<sup>62</sup> and the loss of the general popular support during that year made him consider voluntary exile.<sup>63</sup> He felt more and more as if he was being expelled from society. This, perhaps, explains, in part, his passionate concern for another exiled people—the Jews. Some of this mood was reflected in “Sydøseileren” (*The South Sea Trader*, 1841), which he signed as “Der Geächtete” (The Outlaw):

Fortunate ship which leaves this country! If I am to give you a wish on the way, it is not, “A happy voyage,” but that you may leave it forever. Ah! my wish is heavy; it may weigh you down and thus be fulfilled.—My birth must have been a shipwreck amongst these wild and barren rocks. Woe is me! When at last I can leave them, I shall have no lips for the sweet fruits in my soul’s native country, no foot to print on its springly fragrant green, no arms for the slim brown maidens with which to shake down the oranges over them.

Yet hasten, days, and make my head white like yon dwindling sail! Then death’s sickle will cut the last rope, and I shall follow. For Heaven is where we long to, and Hell is whence we long.<sup>64</sup>

The idea of leaving Norway and settling in England had occurred to him already in 1834 when he failed to obtain an ecclesiastical position with the established state church.<sup>65</sup> Now, in 1841, the thought recurred to him with increased intensity. However, the struggle for justice and equality had tempered his approach and also had convinced him of the necessity to be faithful to his ideals in spite of disappointment, adversity, and vicious opposition. Wergeland expressed these ideals of ethical loyalty in such poems as “Follow the Call” (“Følg Kaldet!”) and “The Power of Truth” (“Efter Tidens Lejlighed,” 1841):

<sup>59</sup> Amundsen and Seip, eds., *Henrik Wergeland Skrifter-Folke-utgaven* (Oslo 1960), vol. 3, p. 305 (“den mest afgjorte Despotisme, have større Religionsfrihed end Nordmændene”).

<sup>60</sup> Koht, *Henrik Wergeland — Hans Liv og Forfattervirksomhed*, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 8, p. 556, “Man kaldte mig paa Prent i det Blad, jeg laa i Strid med, ‘en Akevittedrikker og en Myseostæder’ (One called on print in the paper with which I fought a drunkard of Aquavitt and a glutton of wheycheese.)”

<sup>62</sup> Bull, Jacob B., *Henrik Wergeland, En bok for det norske folk* (HW A Book for the Norwegian People) (Kristiania 1912), pp. 364 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Amundsen, Leiv, ed., *Brev til Henrik Wergeland 1827–1845* (Letters to HW) (Oslo 1956), p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 2, pp. 202–203, *Sydøseileren — Sujet for Versemagere* (The South Sea Trader — A Subject for Poets), tr. by Illit Grøndahl, *Henrik Wergeland Poems*, pp. 85–6.

<sup>65</sup> Koht, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Falsehoods' triumph soon is past;  
 Every word of truth shall last.  
 As a kerchief's touch can throw  
 From the crag the hurtling snow,  
 So a word outspoken may  
 Whelm with truth a world astray.

No mere whisper hushed and still:  
 Friends of truth must more than will.  
 Be thyself in part and whole,  
 That is victory's art, my soul!  
 Like Saint Stephen, all alone  
 Must thou stand and face the stone.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, while undergoing one of the most difficult periods in his life, Wergeland fell back on his inner, spiritual resources. He concentrated his efforts on gaining justice, not for himself but for other people. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the admission of Jews to Norway became his major preoccupation till his untimely death in 1845. By the year 1841 Wergeland had become fully acquainted with foreign constitutions and their treatment of Jews. He found religious liberty flourishing in most countries—but not in Norway. He reported on England and France, where religious tolerance had been firmly established—but not in Norway. He concluded that his native country was not a leader, but a laggard, a nation way behind most other countries in this respect.<sup>67</sup>

Wergeland's fight for religious freedom through prose and poetry had already borne some fruits. Many leading Norwegians, such as Johan Dahl (1807–1877),<sup>68</sup> Andreas Munch (1811–1884), and Rev. I. N. Franzen were active in the movement of admitting Jews to Norway.<sup>69</sup> In an article "For Jøderne" (In Favor of the Jews; May 1842), the latter had argued that, if all nations followed Norway's example, the Jews would have to cease to exist.<sup>70</sup> A work by the noted political scientist Justus von Schmidt-Phiseldeck (1769–1851) stated that strangers in general can not be legally excluded from the borders of a state. "No human being can be denied the right to travel across a nation which lies between his prior place of sojourn and the country where he intends to travel since every citizen of the earth (*Jordborger*) has an inalienable right to exist anywhere in the world."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 2, pp. 210–211 (tr. by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy).

<sup>67</sup> *Henrik Wergeland Poems*, pp. 81–82.

<sup>68</sup> Amundsen and Seip, *op. cit.*, vol. 7, p. xii.

<sup>69</sup> Beyer, Harald, *Norsk Litteraturhistorie* (Oslo 1952), p. 229.

<sup>70</sup> Franzen, I. N., "For Jøderne," *Den Constitutionelle*, 7 de Aargang, no. 135, May 15, 1842, pp. 1–2; "Men hvad er det, de Folkeslag gjøre, som forbyde Jøderne Adgang til deres Land? Søge ikke de, saavidt det staaer til dem, at giørr Jødernes Existence umulig? Vilde all Nationer følge hine Exempel, da maatte jo Jøderne snart ophøre at være til, saasom de intet Sted levnedes dem til Ophold." ("In favor of the Jews": "But what are those people doing who forbid Jews admission to their country? Aren't they trying as far as it is possible, to make the existence of Jews impossible? If all nations should follow that example the Jews had to cease to exist, since no place was left for them to remain.")

<sup>71</sup> *Storthingsforhandlingler*, p. 285; "Med Schmidt-Phiseldeck i hans Indstilling vedlagte Skrift, om Jøderne, anseer den det 'for en Selvfølge, der intet Beviis behøver, at Fremmede i Almindelighed ikke retmæssigen kunne udelukkes fra en Stats Grændser. Intet Menneske kan negtes at reise over en Stats Gebet, som ligger imellem hans forrige Opholdssted og det Land, hvorhen han agter at begive sig, da enhver Jordborger har en medfødt Ret at existere overalt paa Jorden" (The supporting documents by Schmidt-Phiseldesh regarding



The question remained how the Norwegian Parliament would decide the question of admitting Jews which to Wergeland was an expression of religious tolerance. The Constitutional Committee had accepted Wergeland's amendment with a vote of five to two. In the plenary session the amendment needed a two-thirds majority of the ninety-four members of the *Storting* present. In Wergeland's own words, the situation was tense on this fateful day, September 9, 1842: "It was now 12 o'clock; but by disregarding the usual luncheon hour rest, the President declared the debate opened."<sup>72</sup>

Two representatives, Karl Falsen and Gustav Peter Blom, the latter being the only one to have been present at the Constitutional Assembly in 1814, offered cogent arguments for adopting the amendment. On behalf of the clergy Pastor Arup delivered an impassioned plea for the "Jews, once God's chosen people, revered by its antiquity and memories, which also belong to us, revered for the holy religion we confess."<sup>73</sup> The principal of *Bergen Latinskole*, Hans Holmboe, who had earlier advocated the admission of Jews in an article in 1841 in *Bergens Stiftstidende*, maintained that Norway had had no independent experience concerning Jews, but prejudice against them had nevertheless struck roots since the country's laws "had branded the Jewish nation as a pest to be avoided. This would only preserve and maintain prejudice. Since the gospel teaches us that every human being, including the Jew, is our neighbor, the constitutional prohibition runs contrary to the primary tenets of Christianity, and its retention after the repeal is proposed will lead the nation to disgrace, and will stigmatize it in the eyes of foreign countries."<sup>74</sup>

Support for the amendment was also voiced by a number of other important representatives, such as Pastor Castberg and a member of the *Storting*, Søren Sørensen. In spite of all the favorable arguments presented, the final result was not what Wergeland had expected. The amendment to permit Jews to enter Norway was defeated on September 9, 1842, when the vote of 51 in favor and 43 opposed fell short of the necessary two-thirds majority by 11 votes.<sup>75</sup> Six of the seven members of the clergy<sup>76</sup> and twenty-eight farmers had voted *en bloc* against the amendment. Although he was disappointed in the lack of support from the

Jews deem it as a matter of course, which needs no proof, that strangers in general cannot legally be excluded from the borders of a state. No human being can be refused to travel across a state's territory which lies between his former place of sojourn and the country which he intends to go to since every citizen of the world has an inalienable right to exist all over the globe).

<sup>72</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 8, p. 457.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462: "Jøder, engang Guds udvalgte Folk, ærverdigt ved sin Elde og sine Minder, der ogsaa er vore, ærværdigt som Moder for den hellige Religion, vi bekjende os til. . . ."

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 464-466.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 484: "Voteringen har havt saadent udfald: af 94 Tilstedeværende have 51 Herre erklæret sig for Kommittéindstillingen og 43 imod, og Propositionen er saaledes ikke bifaldt" (The vote has had this result: of the 94 present 51 have declared themselves in favor of the Committee's recommendation and 43 against, and the Proposition is thus not being passed).

<sup>76</sup> Kabell, Aage, Wergeland, vol. ii, *Manddommen, Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskapsakademi i Oslo, Historisk-Filosofisk Klasse* (HW, *The Manhood*, Works published by the Norwegian Academy of Science in The Historical-Philosophical Classification) (Oslo 1967), p. 197.



farmers, especially from Gudbrandsdølen Ole Haagenstaad, Wergeland did not despair. An insight into his fighting mood and his confidence in a successful outcome may be gleaned from a letter he wrote the very same afternoon after the voting to his good friend M. S. Warburg in Gothenburg: "The cause will be pursued. . . . About that you may be convinced. Now the friends know each other in this case."<sup>77</sup>

Wergeland pursued the cause with relentless vigor. Already the next day, September 10, 1842, he introduced a renewed proposal for consideration by the *Storting* in 1845. He compared himself to the dandelion—"the weed that grows the more you step on it"<sup>78</sup>—and had adopted the two slogans, *Noli desperare*<sup>79</sup> (do not despair) and *Vincere canendo*<sup>80</sup> (conquer by singing). And sing he did—some of his best poetry stems from this period, notably in his collection of poems which he called *The Jewess. Eleven Blossoming Briar Shoots* (*Jødinden. Elleve blomstrende Tornekviste*, 1844), where he continued to advocate the admission of Jews to Norway, as in his poem "Tornekviste?" (Briar Shoots):

Noble woman, such the bower  
Judah's stock has so richly borne;  
Gentle mothers, flower on flower'  
Heroines bold, when dangers lower;  
Miriam's rose in the triumph hour;  
Judith's rose of the bleeding thorn.

Why should Norway then feel dread of  
Welcoming these to every dale?  
Why in the coldness we are bred of  
Should not our Northern vein be fed of  
Eastern ardor, and love instead of  
Law's harsh voice in our land prevail?<sup>81</sup>

Wergeland was a very sick man when he wrote the prose and poetry contained in *The Jewess*.<sup>82</sup> The poem that introduced this collection, *Paa Sygelejet*, (On The Sickbed) reflected his defiant mood:

These stabs of flame, this icy thrill  
which shivers through my breast—

<sup>77</sup> Amundsen and Seip, *op. cit.*, vol. 7 (Oslo 1959), p. 294. See also Harry M. H. Koritzinsky, "Jødernes Historie i Norge," (Kristiania 1922), pp. 32–33.

<sup>78</sup> In "Den Første Gang," Prolog til *Campbellerne* (1838) (In "For the First Time," a Prologue to "Campbellerne") "Med eet af Løvetand den spredes, den Urt, der groer, jo mer den trædes."

<sup>79</sup> In "Tidselskjæplukkeren" (The Thistledown Gatherer) from *Jøden*, 1842, *Jøden Skrifter*, vol. 3, p. 334.

<sup>80</sup> Kabell, *op. cit.*, vol. i, *Barndom og Ungdom* (Childhood and Youth), p. 354.

<sup>81</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 3, pp. 341, 342 (tr. by Charles Wharton Stork in *Anthology of Norwegian Lyrics* [New York 1942], pp. 34–35).

<sup>82</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 3 (1853), pp. 339–421: 1. *Tornekviste?* (Briar Shoots?) 2. *Blodet* (The Blood) 3. *Mødrene* (The Mothers). 4. *Den lykkelige Viv* (The Happy Wife) 5. *Sjælekamp og Seier* (Mental Agony and Victory) 6. *Kvinderne paa Kirkegaarden* (The Woman at the Cemetery) 7. *Drengen ved Blaaporten* (The Boy at the Blue Gate) 8. *Røst i Ørknen* (A Voice in the Wilderness) 9. *Jeg er nu saadan Jeg* (That's How I am) 10. *Følg Kaldet* (Follow the Call) 11. *Kaadt Ukrud* (Wanton Weeds) 12. *Efterretningen* (The News). The latter poem was written in 1842 after the amendment to admit Jews to Norway had been defeated by the Parliament. The original of this poem was first printed in *Jødesagen i det norske Storting* (1842).

call them thy triumph, Death, they bring  
to me the wayward airs of spring  
stirring in Heaven, now warm, now chill,  
The April of my rest.

But still my heart, in steadfast fight,  
Invading Death defies;  
Still stoutly beating, day by day,  
Undaunted keeps the foe at bay:  
My spirit, tranquil, clear and bright,  
Like moonlit water lies.<sup>83</sup>

In April 1844 he fell ill and entered a race with death. Nevertheless, his creative powers continued unabated. He rewrote *Creation, Man, and Messiah*, completed *The English Pilot* and his memoirs *Hazel Nuts* (1845).<sup>84</sup>

Wergeland reconciled himself to his fate, but lyrics continued to flow from his inspired pen, such as “Den smukke Familie,” (The Beautiful Family, May 1845); “Til Foraaret” (To Spring), and one of his most beloved poems, “Til Min Gyldenlak” (To My Wallflower). Still, Wergeland wanted to live. He had so much undone, but was nevertheless ready to meet his Maker: “I want to live. I love nature too much, and I know how to amuse myself in too simple manners. But I am not so foolish and atheistic not to accept death as a good gift.”<sup>85</sup>

The thought of death did not, however, stifle his energy. At this late stage of his life he was particularly concerned about the forthcoming Parliamentary session to start in the fall of 1845. A letter of May 3, 1845 to his friend Søren Sørensen who again would sponsor a bill for admission of Jews, gives us an insight into Wergeland’s courage on his death-bed: “When the day comes in the Parliament then fight, rage, cry, and when nothing helps, then unmask egotism and brutality with the detachment of a surgeon who slashes the skin off a face during dissection. The people’s honor in the world is at stake. Be angry and courageous.”<sup>86</sup>

During his long illness Wergeland received much encouragement from friends abroad. A special tribute was offered him by the Danish-Jewish author, Meir Aron Goldschmidt, who had written about Wergeland in glowing words in his publication *Corsaren*. On July 7, 1845, Goldschmidt wrote him a personal letter: “When I think of you, Wergeland, I am proud to be human. Here we have proof that immortality exists, that God has given the human being a divine soul. Let me greet you as the greatest of the contemporary Nordic poets.”<sup>87</sup> It was, however, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson who many years later expressed the nation’s grief

<sup>83</sup> *Skrifter*, vol. 2, p. 318 (tr. by Gathorne-Hardy, *Henrik Wergeland Poems*), pp. 136–139.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 8 (1857), pp. 491–634; *Hassel-Nødder, med og uden Kjerne, dog til Tidsfordriv, plukkede af min henvisnede Livs-Busk* (published posthumously, 1845).

<sup>85</sup> Letter to Mrs. Homboe, see Bull and Paasche, *op. cit.*, p. 296: “jeg will gjerne leve. Jeg elsker Naturen for meget og veed at more mig paa for simple maader. — Men saa naragtig og gudløs er jeg ikke, at jeg ikke skulde tage Døden som en god Gave.”

<sup>86</sup> Jæger, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 237–238 (“Naar Dagen kommer i Storthinget, da kjæmp, ras, græd, og naar intet hjælper, da demasker Egoismen og Raaheden med den Chirurgs Kulde, der flænger Huden af et Ansigt under en Obduction. — Det gjælder Folkets Are i Verden. Vær vred og tapper!”)

<sup>87</sup> Amundsen, ed. *op. cit.*, p. 331.

over Wergeland's untimely death by stating that there "had never been a more beautiful sight in the spiritual sphere of the Nordic countries than Henrik Wergeland on his death bed."<sup>88</sup>

Wergeland, who died on July 12, 1845, did not live to see the achievement of his objective: A constitutional amendment adopted by the Norwegian *Storting* on June 13, 1851 by a vote of 93 in favor and only 10 against discontinued the ban against entry of Jews. A Royal Proclamation issued on August 28, 1851 opened the doors of Norway to the Jewish people. The law was sanctioned by King Oscar I on September 24 of the same year, and from that day on the Jews have been free to enter the Kingdom of Norway without any restrictions.

Before his own countrymen erected a monument in Wergeland's honor, Danish and Swedish Jews dedicated a monument to him in Stockholm, Sweden, in October, 1847.<sup>89</sup> The unveiling had to take place there because no Jew was permitted to enter Norway. In 1849, however, a Jewish delegation received letters of safe conduct, and on Wergeland's birthday, June 17, the monument was again unveiled on "Our Savior's Cemetery" (*Vor Frelzers Gravlund*) in Kristiania. This monument is decorated annually by the Norwegian Jews on Norway's National Day, May 17. On its front the monument contains this inscription:

HENRIK WERGELAND b. MDCCCVIII—d. MDCCCXLV —

The tireless Champion of Men's and Citizen's  
Freedom and Right

On the back one reads:

Grateful Jews outside Norway erected this in his memory.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Beyer, Harald, *Norks Litteraturhistorie, Revidert og utvidet ved Edvard Beyer* (Norwegian History of Literature. Revised and extended by Edvard Beyer) (Oslo 1963), p. 193.

<sup>89</sup> Abrahamsen, Samuel, "The Saga of Norway's Jews," *Congress Weekly*, vol. 18, no. 25, October 8, 1951, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Werner, Alfred, "Henrik Arnold Wergeland," *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York 1948), vol. 10, p. 503.